

Music Notes for November 23rd

Prelude: Max Reger: *Nun danket alle Gott*

Introit: Stephen Schwartz: *Prepare Ye* (from *Godspell*)

Anthem: Stephen Schwartz: *All Good Gifts* (from *Godspell*)

Offertory: G.F. Kaufmann: Fuguetta super *Nun danket alle Gott*

Postlude: Sigfrid Karg-Elert: *Marche triomphale* (*Nun danket alle Gott*)

For the week of Thanksgiving, I have decided to concentrate on two distinct styles: pieces centered on the seasonal chorale *Nun danket alle Gott* (Now Thank We All Our God), and two selections from the 1970s Broadway musical *Godspell*. The introit is the opening of the first act (after a prologue called *Tower of Babel*, which is frequently omitted) and is seven words from Isaiah 40:3 "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." It is a very simple melody with an increasingly dense accompaniment over three verses. The anthem, *All Good Gifts*, is a popular hymn text with a refrain paraphrased from James 1:17. The original poetry was written in German by the hymnast Matthias Claudius in the late 18th century, but the English version that we use (and that is used in *Godspell*) comes from the mid 19th century. It comes second to last in the first act, and is a heartfelt hymn that was written very much as a rock anthem.

The Lutheran chorale *Nun danket alle Gott* is by Martin Rinkhart from about 1636 and the music is probably by Crüger from about a decade later. Many settings exist for voices as well as for organ, and I will play three of them today. Max Reger was a German composer particularly well-known as an organist at the turn of the 20th century. His setting of the chorale is from a collection written in 1902 of fifty-two chorale preludes for practical use throughout the church year, somewhat analogous to J.S. Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book). The offertory setting is a typical early Baroque setting with the melody in the top line with figuration beneath, in this case mostly scales.

The postlude is by another German, Sigfrid Karg-Elert (the Elert is not a family name, but was suggested by an agent to make the composer's name sound more distinctive). He worked in the early 20th century, and in the long-standing tradition of his country, wrote about a hundred organ pieces based on chorale tunes. This particular one is called *Marche triomphale* and if you want to find the chorale tune, you either have to have very keen ears or else come and look at my score afterwards to see where the composer indicated the notes with Xs. Nevertheless, it is definitely a setting of *Nun danket alle Gott*, one of the composer's grandest and most famous pieces, and deservedly so.

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